

Des Moines Follow-up Case Study

[Full scale site visits were conducted in Des Moines during the spring of 2004 and 2005. Deb Hansen and Beverly Showers met with the executive committee for professional development in Des Moines Public School to learn the district's overall structure for implementing the Iowa Professional Development Model. The 2006 follow-up was a phone interview conducted with the coordinator for Second Chance Reading, Jane Hildenbrand.]

In the spring of 2004, we first visited Des Moines Public Schools to study their implementation of the Iowa Professional Development Model (IPDM) with respect to a specific, district-wide program – Second Chance Reading (SCR). Following that first visit, we noted that the program was strong on the design of training, the continuing cycle (on-going learning opportunities, collaboration, implementation) and evaluation portions of the IPDM. We also observed that the district had additional work to do in bringing overall professional development in line with the operating principles of the IPDM. While there were many initiatives operating within this large district, individual components of various programs needed to be aligned with the IPDM.

District Alignment with the IPDM

When we first visited Des Moines Public Schools, the district had a board-adopted goal of 75% reading proficiency. In the current year, that goal has been increased to 100% of students proficient in reading.

Multiple reading initiatives were operating throughout the district but varied widely in training design, learning opportunities, opportunities for teacher collaboration, study of implementation, and evaluation. While elementary programs were very structured, secondary programs were not aligned with the IPDM, with the exception of the Second Chance Reading program. Middle and high school building literacy teams are being restructured during the 2005-06 school year and currently are providing leadership in literacy professional development. Their roles vary depending upon building needs.

In the spring of 2005 we met with the executive committee responsible for designing professional development in Des Moines. This committee has developed a district PD plan, *Plan for Progress*, based on board goals and priorities as well as an 18-month professional development calendar. At the end of the 2004-05 school year a Deputy Director of Professional Development was hired (Lora Wunsch.) The PD Committee is now more balanced in terms of representation, meets much more regularly and discussions are focused on IPDM components.

As part of the *Plan for Progress*, the district has provided a Leadership Academy for the past two years for leadership teams from 60 schools to improve achievement through the building of leadership capacity. The group meets monthly and has studied theories of leadership as well as school improvement. Perhaps the most notable accomplishment of this group has been providing a structure for the development of integrated professional development and school improvement plans. A conference-type format at the end of the year allowed schools to study specific areas of need within their SIP's. This year, the work of the academy has moved to the development of action plans and schools consequently are more focused on the lines connecting goals for student learning, professional development and student learning.

The major difficulties schools were experiencing in implementing the IPDM were the selection of content, building implementation plans and monitoring them. Significant progress has been made in the area of formative evaluation. The district's adoption of *Follow the Leader*, an on-line program, provides a test bank of items for regular, systematic benchmark testing in reading and math across the district. The formative data from three benchmark tests is used to remediate skills through classroom instruction and the use of the tutorial component of homeroom.com.

Considerable progress has been made in monitoring implementation at the secondary level for specific programs. For example, middle and high schools that participated in the DE's QAR academy have action plans that detail expectations for use and implementation is monitored through lesson plans and walk-throughs. This provides a good model, along with SCR, for other high school initiatives that will be implemented and evaluated for their impact on student learning.

The general elementary implementation goal is 75% of teachers will use the training content with 75% accuracy. Elementary literacy teams continue to receive district support in content and are actively striving for implementation at the classroom levels. The study of implementation varies widely from building to building, from formal study of implementation in *Reading First* schools to oral reports of teacher perception of use in some buildings.

The use of collaborative teams for the implementation of PD content was mixed within the district, with some schools completely organized into collaborative teams and others having no collaborative structures. As a result of the Leadership Academy, all schools now have a provision for teacher collaboration and school leadership teams are now beginning to provide greater structure for those collaborative groups. While the collaborative groups are not school-wide in all buildings, progress is being made.

The Des Moines district has made considerable progress in aligning with the IPDM. A continuing challenge is the study of implementation of various initiatives so that program effects on students can be evaluated. Because principals have now been trained in walk-through procedures, it may be possible to formalize an observational method for studying implementation.

The development of individual school improvement plans with PD components integrated into action plans has moved schools toward a greater focus on means and ends. The addition of benchmark testing for middle and high school reading and math provides a useful tool for collecting formative data on the multiple programs in place within the district.

A major curriculum mapping initiative begun during the 2005-2006 academic year is progressing rapidly. Study groups for each subject have examined their curriculums, identified expected learning and how that learning aligns with current assessments as well as implications for PD. Math is completed and reading is completed through grade eight. By the beginning of the fall of 2006, it is anticipated that all required high school courses will be mapped.

Update of DMPS's Second Chance Reading PD Initiative

The content, structures for collaboration, study of implementation, and summative data collection for Second Chance Reading have remained stable for the past two years. A district measure has been added to the formative data collection but the major change has occurred in the training design.

Training Design

The development of a cadre of SCR trainers was begun in the spring of 2003. During their initial year of training, cadre members studied with the SCR trainer and assisted in training events. For the past two years, cadre members have assisted in large summer training sessions and have done follow-up training and support independently, with the facilitation of a district SCR coordinator. Participants in SCR training continue to have three days of follow-up training while all SCR teachers have three half-days of follow-up during an academic year.

Results

Student growth has continued to be robust with the change in training design (see table below for 2004-2005 academic year). The combination of consistent facilitation to ensure the functioning of collaborative teams and the collection of data and a strong cadre of trainers to reinforce skill development has clearly worked in Des Moines. While all programs can benefit from periodic infusions of expert assistance, the Des Moines SCR program is no longer dependent on an outside trainer for program implementation.

Second Chance Reading Regular Education with Included Special Education Students by Subgroup 2004-2005

Mean Growth in NGE on SDRT and Jamestown Timed Readings

	Comp.	Fluency Difference (WPM)
Male (339)	2.1	46
Female (300)	1.6	34
Low SES (359)	1.7	36
SpEd (65)	1.6	50
Non SpEd (574)	1.9	39
ELL (80)	2.0	44
Black (112)	1.45	35
White (401)	2.0	40
Hispanic (80)	1.6	41
Asian (34)	2.8	54
American Indian [6]	[2.4]	[106]

Expansion

The success of the SCR program in the Des Moines Public Schools led to its expansion for the 2005-06 academic year. The program is now provided in all district middle and high schools and three SCR coaches now work with both new and veteran teachers to provide training and support. SCR coaches teach half days and provide support half days. Support activities include demonstration teaching, assistance with organization (room set-up, library organization, etc.) SCR coaches even assist new teachers with catch-up when they fall behind by doing book talks with students and individual vocabulary testing.

In addition, the district has invested in an additional reading program – Read 180 (Scholastic) for students who are reading well-below grade level and/or whose learning style is more individual rather than cooperative. Two Read 180 labs are now in place at all district middle and high schools – one for special education students and one for regular education students. While SCR has been extremely successful in Des Moines, no program addresses the needs of all students, and the addition of an alternative for struggling secondary readers is a wise investment.

Collaboration

The formation and maintenance of collaborative teams for SCR teachers has been greatly eased by the expansion of the program. In earlier years, the district SCR coordinator was forced to create teams across schools because of the small number of teachers at most sites and this entailed travel for the teachers as well as after school meetings. With more teachers at each site, teams are now within schools and meeting times can be incorporated into the school day. Teams meet on a bi-weekly basis within their schools, with the exception of high school teachers who meet at one high school from 1:15 to 3:15 bi-weekly. The high school teachers are doing intensive lesson development in an effort to create a common bank of Think Aloud selections and comprehension lessons that all can use.

Formative Data Collection

The benchmark tests adopted by the district have been incorporated into the SCR formative assessment. In addition to collecting on-going information on books read, vocabulary words mastered and Jamestown comprehension and fluency measures, SCR now administer the reading comprehension benchmark tests on the same schedule as all district teachers.

Conclusion

The SCR program continues to thrive in the Des Moines Public Schools. It is important to note that this program, like all new programs, requires continued support and facilitation at all levels of the organization to maintain implementation, quality and results.

The Des Moines Public School District has made impressive gains during the past two years in bringing district PD planning and programs in line with the Iowa Professional Development Model. Although implementation varies widely from school to school, the necessary structures are being developed at the central level and this is excellent progress.